

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6298

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As of January 25, 2016

**Title:** An act relating to homeless student stability and opportunities.

**Brief Description:** Enacting the homeless student stability and opportunity gap act.

**Sponsors:** Senators Frockt, Litzow, O'Ban, Fain, Mullet, Dammeier, Jayapal, Billig, Rivers, Pedersen, Rolfes, Darneille, McAuliffe, Hasegawa, Carlyle, Habib, Keiser, Conway and Lias.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/21/16.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

**Staff:** Ailey Kato (786-7434)

**Background:** The McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act is a federal law that provides federal grant funding to states for the purpose of supporting school districts to serve homeless students. It defines "homeless children" as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Under the Act, school districts are required to designate a homeless student education liaison to ensure that homeless children and youth are identified and served. The liaison must provide public notice to homeless families – in the community and at school – and facilitate access to school services including transportation. School districts are also required to annually report data regarding homeless students to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). According to the OSPI website, Washington receives approximately \$950,000 in funding each year under the Act.

In 2014, the Legislature passed legislation requiring school districts and OSPI to report specified data on homeless students. Additionally the legislation directed OSPI to distribute best practices for choosing and training school district-designated homeless student liaisons, and to develop or acquire a short video that provides information on how to identify signs that indicate a student may be homeless.

Legislation in 2015 defined "unaccompanied homeless student" as a student who is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, and is homeless. It also required that OSPI report the number of identified unaccompanied homeless students enrolled in public schools.

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

The Department of Commerce (Commerce) administers housing programs designed specifically to address the needs of low-income and homeless populations. The Washington Homeless Client Management Information System is implemented by Commerce for the ongoing collection of information about all homeless individuals in the state. The information comes from the Washington homeless census and from state agencies and community organizations providing services to homeless individuals and families.

**Summary of Bill:** School Support for Homeless Students and Unaccompanied Youth. OSPI must create a competitive grant process to evaluate and award state-funded three-year grants to school districts to increase identification of homeless students and the capacity of the districts to provide support for homeless students, which may include education liaisons. The process must minimize OSPI overhead and administrative costs. A definition of homeless students, which is the same as the federal definition, is provided.

The state grant award criteria must be based on the demonstrated need of the school districts, the ability of the district to meet the need, and the quality of the applications submitted. Preference must be given to districts that demonstrate a commitment to serving the needs of unaccompanied youth.

Districts receiving grants must measure during the academic year how often each student physically moves, what services families or unaccompanied youth could access, and whether or not a family or unaccompanied youth received stable housing by the end of the school year.

School districts may access both federal and state funding to identify and support homeless students. School districts may not use the state grant funds to supplant existing federal, state, or local resources for homeless student supports.

Each school district that has identified more than 10 unaccompanied youth must establish a building point of contact in each middle and high school. These points of contact must be appointed by the principal and are responsible for identifying homeless and unaccompanied youth and connecting them with the school district's homeless student liaison. The school district homeless student liaison is responsible for training building points of contact.

Housing Assistance. Commerce in consultation with OSPI must develop and administer a competitive grant program. The stated goal of the grant program is to provide educational stability for homeless students by promoting housing stability.

Up to 15 grants of up to \$500,000 may be awarded each school year to school districts that partner with an eligible organization – a local government, local housing authority, regional support network, nonprofit community or neighborhood-based organization, federally recognized Indian tribe, or regional or statewide nonprofit housing assistance organization. Preference must be given to school districts with a demonstrated commitment of partnership and history with eligible organizations.

The grant funds may be used for, but not limited to, rental assistance, transportation assistance, emergency shelter, and housing stability case management.

All beneficiaries of grant funds must be unaccompanied youth or from very low-income households, which is defined as an unaccompanied youth, family, or unrelated persons living together whose adjusted income is less than 50 percent of the median family income for the county where the grant recipient is located.

Grantee school districts must collect specified data and report it to the Legislature along with related policy recommendations. Data on all program participants must be entered into the Washington Homeless Client Management Information System. OSPI must monitor the programs, including specified components, at least once every two years beginning in the 2016-17 school year.

If specific funding for this grant program is not provided in the Omnibus Appropriations Act, the provisions addressing the program are null and void.

Report. The list of data on homeless students on which OSPI must report is expanded to add the number of identified homeless students of color. The number of identified unaccompanied homeless students must be included for each district and the state under "student demographics" on the Washington State Report Card website.

**Appropriation:** \$2 million GFS to OSPI for the grants in section 2 in FY 2017; and \$2 million GFS to OSPI for the grants in section 2 in FY 2018.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: A high number of homeless students and students in foster care do not graduate. Helping these students will increase graduation rates and help close the opportunity gap. The achievement gap between low-income and high-income students has widened. School is the common place that touches homeless children and is often the first place to catch these children before they fall into chronic homelessness and intergenerational poverty. Funds that support housing also support the education of low-income children. Money spent on transportation for homeless students can be better put into housing near schools. Every time students move, they lose months of their education. Providing stability and safety for students allows them to flourish. There are too few social service workers in the state to serve homeless students. Liaisons are needed to identify homeless students who can go unnoticed or be seen as problem students. It is more difficult to identify homeless students in middle and high schools. Liaisons need more support because they often have other responsibilities at schools. There are not many housing options for unaccompanied youth. This bill does not provide additional options for these youth. The bill's provision that does not allow new grant funds to supplant existing local resources is not fair or equitable. Local taxpayers in a district with a high number of homeless students should not have to shoulder the cost of supporting these students while taxpayers in wealthier areas with a low homeless student population do not have these costs.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Frockt, prime sponsor; Michael Mirra, Tacoma Housing Authority/Executive Director; Dave Larson, Tukwila School District; Katara Jordan, Columbia Legal Services/Attorney; Taylor Frese, Western Washington University student; KeAndra Radchenko; Brandy Sincyr, Columbia Legal Services; Pat Soderquist, Centralia School District Homeless Liaison; Eric Utto-Galarneau, St. Mark Lutheran Church, Lacey Pastor.